The Impact of the European Reformation

Princes, Clergy and People

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ASHGATE

Published by
Ashgate Publishing Limited
Gower House
Croft Road
Aldershot
Hampshire GU11 3HR
England

Ashgate Publishing Company
Suite 420
101 Cherry Street
Burlington, VT 05401–4405
USA

Ashgate website: http://www.ashgate.com

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
The impact of the European Reformation : princes, clergy and people.
– (St Andrews studies in Reformation history)
1. Reformation 2. Europe – Civilization – 16th century
3. Europe – Civilization – 17th century
I. Heal, Bridget II. Grell, Ole Peter
940.2'3

ISBN 978–0–7546–6212–9

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
The impact of the European Reformation : princes, clergy, and people / edited by Bridget Heal and Ole Grell.
p. cm. – (St. Andrews studies in Reformation history)
Includes index.
ISBN 978–0–7546–6212–9 (alk. paper)
1. Reformation – Influence.
I. Heal, Bridget. II. Grell, Ole Peter.

BR307.I46 2007
274'.06–dc22 2007034440

ISBN 978–0–7546–6212–9

Printed and bound in Great Britain by MPG Books Ltd, Bodmin, Cornwall

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CHAPTER 2

The Politics of Law and Gospel: The Protestant Prince and the Holy Roman Empire

C. Scott Dixon

In describing the aspects of power at the heart of the German princely state, the seventeenth-century historian and political theorist Veit Ludwig von Seckendorff did not hesitate to include the rule of public religion among them, for the defence of the faith and the preservation of Christian morality was one of the duties entrusted to the higher secular authorities by God. As Seckendorff noted: 'the main purpose of all [rule] is the salutary maintenance of *Polizey*, that is [maintenance of] the whole realm in its justice, power, sovereignty, and religion, the final aim being the honour of God'.[1] This is a quality of early modern rule that has sometimes been overlooked by historians interested in the making of the German territorial state. Traditional approaches have emphasized the secular features of the process, in particular the evolution of centralized governance, the growth of bureaucracy, the rise of the military, the onset of written records, and the rationalization of rule; but in the majority of these models, confessional change has been viewed as a parallel or a secondary development.[2] Constitutional histories have approached the theme from the same perspective. The point of origin in the history of the German state

[1] Veit Ludwig von Seckendorff, *Teutscher Fürsten-Stat* (Frankfurt, 1660), pp. 138–9; Michael Stolleis, 'Veit Ludwig von Seckendorff', in Michael Stolleis (ed.), *Staatsdenker in der frühen Neuzeit* (Munich, 1995), pp. 152–60.

[2] See the discussions in Wim Blockmans, 'Les origines des états modernes en Europe, XIIIe–XVIIIe siècles: état de la question et perspectives', in Wim Blockmans and Jean-Philippe Genet (eds), *Visions sur le développement des états Européens. Théories et historiographies de l'état moderne* (Rome, 1993), pp. 1–14; Wolfgang Reinhard, 'Das Wachstum der Staatsgewalt: historische Reflexionen', *Der Staat*, 31 (1992): 59–75. On the rise of German monarchy and the conditions of its growth, see Robert von Friedeburg, 'The Making of Patriots: Love of Fatherland and Negotiating Monarchy in Seventeenth-Century Germany', *The Journal of Modern History*, 77 (2005): 881–916. For a sovereign overview of European developments, see Hillay Zmora, *Monarchy, Aristocracy and the State in Europe 1300–1800* (London, 2001).

is the fifteenth century, with the crucial period running from 1450 to 1570, for this is when the central features of the modern territorial powers began to take shape. Confessional developments have been imagined within the parameters of this process, and while religious belief is clearly seen as a central feature of early modern social and political life, the religious upheavals have not been viewed as a catalyst.[3]

In recent years, however, religion has made a comeback, and indeed to the point where confessional change is now considered by some historians to have been the 'heuristic indicator' of broader patterns of change.[4] In part, this new perspective is due to a gradual shift in historiographical priorities, a turn away from the grand inclusive vision to a concern with simultaneous narratives based on local contexts and distinct spheres of experience. Models of state growth and political power now speak in terms of different levels of development, starting at the level of interaction between individuals and groups (where the power of religion was most in evidence), and reaching to the macro level and the rise of nations.[5] Even more significant in German historiography has been the influence of the idea of confessionalization.[6] In this model, religious change is not

[3] Ernst Schubert, 'Die Umformung spätmittelalterlicher Fürstenherrschaft im 16. Jahrhundert', *Rheinische Vierteljahrsblätter*, 63 (1999): 209: 'Zu betonen ist: Diese Veränderung hängt mitnichten mit der Reformation zusammen, sondern ist Folge einer Vielzahl von innerterritorial endogenen und exterritorial exogenen Einwirkungen auf die bestehenden Verhältnisse'; compare Fritz Hartung, *Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte vom 15. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart, 1950), pp. 53–80; Dietmar Willoweit, 'Allgemeine Merkmale der Verwaltungsorganisation in den Territorien', in Kurt G.A. Jeserich, Hans Pohl and Georg-Christoph von Unruh (eds), *Deutsche Verwaltungsgeschichte: Vom Spätmittelalter bis zum Ende des Reiches* (Stuttgart, 1983), vol. 1, pp. 289–345.

[4] The expression comes from Heinz Schilling, 'Confessional Europe', in Thomas A. Brady, Heiko Oberman and James D. Tracy (eds), *Handbook of European History, 1400–1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation* (Leiden, 1995), vol. 2, p. 643.

[5] Wolfgang Reinhard, 'Croissance de la puissance de l'état: un modèle théorique', in André Stegmann (ed.), *Pouvoir et institutions en Europe au XVIième siècle* (Paris, 1987), pp. 173–86; Wolfgang Reinhard, 'Power Elites, State Servants, Ruling Classes, and the Growth of State Power', in Wolfgang Reinhard (ed.), *Power Elites and State Building* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 1–18; for new models at the macrohistorical level, see Thomas Ertman, *Birth of the Leviathan: Building States and Regimes in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 1–34.

[6] Fundamental for the original conceptualization of the idea: Wolfgang Reinhard, 'Zwang zur Konfessionalisierung? Prolegomena zu einer Theorie des konfessionellen Zeitalters', *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung*, 10 (1983): 268–77, trans. as 'Pressures towards Confessionalization? Prolegomena to a Theory of the Confessional Age', in C. Scott Dixon (ed.), *The German Reformation: The Essential Readings* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 169–92; Heinz Schilling, 'Die Konfessionalisierung im Reich. Religiöser und gesellschaftlicher Wandel in Deutschland zwischen 1555

viewed as derivative or subordinate to the forces at work in the secular sphere. On the contrary, religious reform, both the Catholic and the Protestant variants, is thought to have had an ordering function in the process of social and political change.[7] By the end of the sixteenth century, large German territories such as Brandenburg, Saxony and Bavaria had evolved into powerful and sophisticated sovereign states, with systems of governance that made little or no distinction between the secular and the spiritual, notions of identity rooted in the symbols, ritual and language of religion, and a philosophy of rule that sought its final justification in works of theology. To an extent without precedent in German history, the secular and the spiritual joined together in common purpose.[8]

Speaking in such broad terms, however, tends to elude some of the more subtle questions relating to the Reformation and political change. The idea of confessionalization, for instance, projects a model of historical development that in its essentials applies to all of the territories of the empire, whether Catholic, Lutheran or Reformed, and it tends to view developments from a statist perspective, using the relative wealth of normative sources to project an inclusive historical dynamic.[9] Moreover, explanatory theories that tie so many developments together – both secular and spiritual – often make it difficult to distinguish between cause and effect. In this case, to what extent can we attribute political developments to religious factors, and to what extent was the Reformation itself brought into being by the shifts in late medieval relations of power? In what follows,

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und 1620', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 246 (1988): 1–45, trans. as 'Confessionalization in the Empire: Religious and Societal Change in Germany between 1555 and 1620', in Heinz Schilling (trans.) Stephen Burnett, *Religion, Political Culture, and the Emergence of Early Modern Society: Essays in German and Dutch History* (Leiden, 1992), pp. 204–45. The literature on confessionalization is now legion. For a synthesis of recent research, see Stefan Ehrenpreis and Ute Lotz-Heumann, *Reformation und konfessionelles Zeitalter* (Darmstadt, 2002), pp. 62–81.

[7] Schilling, 'Die Konfessionalisierung', p. 5; Schilling, 'Confessionalization', p. 208; Ehrenpreis and Lotz-Heumann, *Reformation und konfessionelles Zeitalter*, pp. 64–5.

[8] Martin Heckel, *Deutschland im konfessionellen Zeitalter* (Göttingen, 2001), p. 13.

[9] Recent critical discussions of the idea can be found in Heinz Schilling, 'Die Konfessionalisierung von Kirche, Staat und Gesellschaft – Profil, Leistung, Defizite und Perspektiven eines geschichtswissenschaftlichen Paradigmas', in Wolfgang Reinhard and Heinz Schilling (ed.), *Die katholische Konfessionalisierung* (Münster, 1995), pp. 419–52; Walter Ziegler, 'Altgläubige Territorien im Konfessionalisierungsprozeß', in Anton Schindling and Walter Ziegler (ed.), *Die Territorien des Reichs im Zeitalter der Reformation und Konfessionalisierung* (Münster 1997), vol. 7, pp. 67–90; Anton Schindling, 'Konfessionalisierung und Grenzen von Konfessionalisierbarkeit', in ibid., pp. 9–44; Heinrich Richard Schmidt, 'Sozialdisziplinierung? Ein Plädoyer für das Ende des Etatismus in der Konfessionalisierungsforschung', *Historische Zeitschrift* 265 (1997): 639–82.

I would like to take up some of the issues relating to the Reformation and the rise of the confessional principality in sixteenth-century Germany, but with more of a view to the particulars than the overarching vision. At the centre of the analysis will be the following questions: To what extent did the Reformation affect the actual praxis of rule in the German territories? Was the movement a catalyst for political change and if so how did this influence the methods and the philosophy of princely sovereignty? Did Protestantism have an impact on the sense of political community in the German lands, whether at the level of the empire or the level of the territory? And finally, what is the best way to conceptualize these developments – as a chain of interconnected events, or a more sweeping and seamless process of change?

Process and Event in the Princely Reformation

The foundation stone for the rise of the Protestant state in Germany was the principle *ius reformandi* ('right of reformation'), a term first used with frequency during the seventeenth century, but which in fact described a state of affairs that had been put in place by the Peace of Augsburg (1555). The right of reformation, as the name suggests, made it possible for the Lutheran and later Calvinist princes to determine the religion of their lands and influence the workings of the Church. This was not entirely without precedent. Historians working on late medieval Germany have drawn attention to the powers already exercised over the Church by the princes of the larger territories.[10] To do this, the medieval prince had two legal means at his disposal: the right of patronage, and the right of guardianship or advocacy (*Vogtei*), both of which enabled some rulers – the electors of Saxony being the best examples – to dominate the institutional Church and its higher clergy in their territories. (To use the words of the historian Manfred Schulze, the medieval bishops of Saxony were little more than the 'spiritual officials' of the prince.)[11] But the princes never claimed the right

[10] See Enno Bünz and Christoph Volkmar, 'Das landesherrliche Kirchenregiment in Sachsen vor der Reformation', in Enno Bünz, Stefan Rhein and Günther Wartenberg (eds), *Glaube und Macht. Theologie, Politik und Kunst im Jahrhundert der Reformation* (Leipzig 2005), pp. 89–109.

[11] Manfred Schulze, *Fürsten und Reformation. Geistliche Reformpolitik weltlicher Fürsten vor der Reformation* (Tübingen, 1991), p. 133; Wilhelm Dersch, 'Territorium, Stadt und Kirche im ausgehenden Mittelalter', *Korrespondenzblatt des Gesamtvereins der deutschen Geschichts- und Altertumsvereine*, 80 (1932), pp. 32–51; Isnard W. Frank, 'Kirchengewalt und Kirchenregiment in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit', *Innsbrücker Historische Studien*, 9 (1987), pp. 33–60; Justus Hashagen, 'Die vorreformatorische Bedeutung des spätmittelalterlichen landesherrlichen Kirchenregiments', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, 41 (1922), pp. 63–93.

to influence matters touching on religious belief. On occasion, and always with papal dispensation, they could oversee a visitation of the monasteries, but this was with a view to reforming discipline or administration. Moreover, it was always done on the basis of papal privilege within the framework of canon law. The *ius reformandi* that emerged with the Reformation was fundamentally different in kind. With the Augsburg settlement, the Protestant princes were granted the right to introduce the Reformation, the right to determine the religion of the subject population in their lands (with a clause allowing emigration to avoid problems of conscience), the right to maintain the Church property in their possession, and the suspension of all jurisdiction – ecclesiastical and imperial – that impeded the sovereignty of the Protestant Church.[12]

All of this was completely new, and not just the entitlement to establish the Lutheran faith, which obviously had no precedent, but the legal stipulations as well. New formulations had been forced on the empire by historical circumstance, for none of the medieval privileges extended far enough to justify the Protestant rejection of Catholic teaching and canon law. In his study of the evolution of the *ius reformandi*, Bernd Christian Schneider has shown in detail how the settlement was pieced together to deal with the crises of mid-century (paramount being the wars between Charles V and the German princes).[13] Even the famous formula *cuius regio, eius religio* ('his the rule, his the religion'), the later juridical standard of the confessional state, was forced by events. Indeed, a similar idea was first proposed by the Catholic minorities threatened by Protestant advances, who saw the solution for each of the parties in Ephesians 4:5: 'There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.' The end result was confirmed with the Peace of Augsburg (1555), a settlement that was in large part an affirmation of changes already in train, but also a clear point of division between the piecemeal advances of the embryonic evangelical powers and the rise of the confessional state. After the mid-century Peace, the Lutheran territories began to build.[14]

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[12] On the Peace of Augsburg, see Axel Gotthard, *Der Augsburger Religionsfrieden* (Münster, 2004); on the relationship between sovereignty and the growth of the territorial Church, see Dietmar Willoweit, *Rechtsgrundlagen der Territorialgewalt. Landesobrigkeit, Herrschaftsrechte und Territorium in der Rechtswissenschaft der Neuzeit* (Cologne and Vienna, 1975), pp. 34–110; Jörn Sieglerschmidt, *Territorialstaat und Kirchenregiment. Studien zur Rechtsdogmatik des Kirchenpatronatsrechts im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert* (Cologne and Vienna, 1987), pp. 8–23; Burkhard von Bonin, *Die praktische Bedeutung des Ius Reformandi* (Stuttgart, 1902).

[13] Bernd Christian Schneider, *Ius Reformandi. Die Entwicklung eines Staatkirchenrechts von seinen Anfängen biz zum Ende des Alten Reiches* (Tübingen, 2001), pp. 51–170.

[14] Compare Holger Thomas Gräf, *Konfession und internationales System. Die Außenpolitik Hessen-Kassels im konfessionellen Zeitalter* (Darmstadt and

With the right of reformation and the rise of the Protestant Church, a new matrix of rule emerged, reaching from the higher councils of princely sovereignty down to the office of village schoolmaster.[15] Dioceses and chapters were absorbed into the state and partitioned according to secular boundaries. In some areas, this resulted in the restructuring of parishes, as Catholic clergy were dismissed, evangelical clergy were put into office, and district officials took stock of local affairs. Overnight, parishes could be reduced in size, property could change hands, and fees and dues could devolve to a new lord.[16] More ominous for the actual exercise of local power was the extension of princely rule to the parish level. In the Lutheran margraviate of Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach, for instance, a clear chain of command emerged stretching from the higher offices of the state through the institutions and individuals responsible for rule at the level of the administrative districts to the Lutheran pastors, and finally, through them, to the parishioners in the villages. Each level was tied to the next through the mandates and Church orders. The yearly visitation process, for instance, was overseen by the special superintendent and the consistory in the capital; regional superintendents implemented the visitations, travelling from parish to parish accompanied by margravial officials; once in the villages, the local servants of the Church reported to the superintendents, while separate hearings were held for the village officials. With the progress complete, the results were compiled and then forwarded to the consistory for the officials to act on the information.[17]

All of this restructured relations of power in the principality. Not only did the local officials have much less political independence, but the rural parishioners, by virtue of the reforming mission of the Protestant Church, were necessarily bound up in the same compact. As Ernst Walter Zeeden

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Marburg, 1993), pp. 73–7; on the Peace of Augsburg, see Gotthard, *Der Augsburger Religionsfrieden*.

[15] See Werner Freitag, 'Konfessionelle Kulturen und innere Staatsbildung. Zur Konfessionalisierung in westfälischen Territorien', *Westfälische Forschung*, 42 (1992): 74–191.

[16] Joachim Conrad, 'Die Umstrukturierung des Pfarreisystems durch die Reformation in Nassau-Saarbrücken', *Monatshefte für Evangelische Kirchengeschichte des Rheinlandes*, 51 (2002): 47–66; Eberhard Fritz, 'Reformation als Prozeß. Verlauf und Fortgang im Amt Urach und den angrenzenden Herrschaften unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Schwäbischen Alb', *Blätter für Württembergische Kirchengeschichte*, 92 (1992): 34–58.

[17] C. Scott Dixon, *The Reformation and Rural Society: The Parishes of Brandenburg-Ansbach-Kulmbach, 1528–1603* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 60–65, 129–31; for the rise of the territorial state in Brandenburg-Ansbach, see Rudolf Endres, 'Die Reformation im fränkischen Wendelstein', in Peter Blickle, ed., *Zugänge zur bäuerlichen Reformation* (Zurich, 1978), pp. 127–46; Rudolf Endres, 'Stadt und Landgemeinde in Franken', in Peter Blickle (ed.), *Landgemeinde und Stadtgemeinde in Mitteleuropa* (Munich, 1991), pp. 101–17.

once remarked, even during the church service the parishioners were now reminded that they were subjects of the state.[18] Little wonder that historians have begun to draw attention to the process of centralization and consolidation in the German territories that gathered momentum from the second half of the sixteenth century onward, thus precisely at the stage when the second generation of Protestant princes was able to establish an equilibrium of rule in the empire. More interested in internal consolidation than external advance, and with much less to fear from the Habsburgs in light of the legalization of the faith, the Lutheran rulers, drawing on their perceived role as God's agents on earth and *Landesväter* over their subjects, embarked on a campaign of domestic reform that has often been viewed as a first stage in the rise of the modern state.[19]

Given the implications of this process for the course of German history, it is easy to overlook the fact that it was more the result of necessity than calculation. In this sense, the princely Reformation was more the consequence of a series of events than the outcome of a process reaching back to the medieval period. And two events in particular dictated the terms – the Peasants' War of 1525, and the rise of the Anabaptists. Both incidents forced the hands of the authorities at a stage when there was not yet a sense of vision or resolution, and both provided a basis for secular intervention into religious affairs by equating false faith with civil disobedience. The Peasants' War worked as a catalyst, as it required the princes to take a political stand on issues that had primarily been a war of words. The immediate consequence was the diet of Speyer (1526) and the compromise formula of its recess (that each ruler, with reference to the Edict of Worms, should conduct his affairs 'as [they] hope and trust to answer to God and his imperial majesty'), which has often been considered a turning point in the German Reformation.[20] But even more significant was the threat posed by the Anabaptists, for they not only provided the authorities with ample evidence of the worldly dangers of false religion. Unlike the rebels of 1525, the Anabaptists had not been defeated in battle. This required the secular authorities to develop more permanent methods of dealing with religious affairs, and in order to do this, the princes turned to the theologians. It was out of this dialogue that the Church orders, the religious mandates and the reform process began to take shape.

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[18] Ernst Walter Zeeden, *Die Entstehung der Konfessionen. Grundlagen und Formen der Konfessionsbildung im Zeitalter der Glaubenskämpfe* (Munich, 1965), p. 119.

[19] See the discussion and the literature in Manfred Rudersdorf, 'Patriarchalisches Fürstenregiment and Reichsfriede. Zur Role des neuen lutherischen Regententyps im Zeitalter der Konfessionalisierung,' in Heinz Duchhardt and Matthias Schnettger (eds), *Reichsständische Libertät und Habsburgisches Kaisertum* (Mainz, 1999), pp. 309–27.

[20] Peter Blickle, *Die Reformation im Reich* (Stuttgart, 1992), pp. 154–5.

We can follow the course of this development in Electoral Saxony. In the beginning, Luther resisted the intervention of the secular arm; he even came to the defence of Thomas Müntzer with appeals to freedom of conscience. His main concern at the outset was establishing clear lines of demarcation between the secular and the spiritual, and in particular keeping the Church free of manipulation by the state, an idea he spelled out in some detail in his work *On Secular Authority* (1523). With the rise of the radicals and the Anabaptists, however, first in Zwickau, Wittenberg and Allstedt, and then throughout the lands of northern and western Thuringia, he began to appeal to the secular authorities to intervene in the course of reform.[21] As early as 1524, Luther had changed his mind and was advising the elector to act against Thomas Müntzer, and gradually he broadened the extent of the prince's commission, to the point where he claimed the ruler was the 'instrument' of God with the obligation to see through the reform of the Church in the absence of any initiative from the bishops.[22] He feared that the radical preachers were leading the faithful to their own destruction, proof that the Devil 'intends through these emissaries to create rebellion and murder (even if for a while he carries on peacefully), and to overthrow both spiritual and temporal government against the will of God'.[23]

Remaining true to the two-kingdoms format, Luther simply enlarged the scale of secular responsibility until it embraced the activities of the radical preachers and allowed for the secular magistrate to impose order on the movement. For instance, after the Peasants' War, Luther began to make a distinction between matters of conscience and instances of blasphemy, the latter being a public concern as it affected the entire congregation. With the publication of the *Instructions for the Visitors of Saxony* (1528), blasphemy or unrest (*Aufruhr*) was defined as anything that deviated from the faith as stipulated in the *Instructions*. As John Oyer has remarked, 'Luther developed the idea that blasphemy, the open proclamation of a heretical view, constituted a form of sedition.'[24] As a consequence, the activities of the radical reformers fell subject to the secular arm. Luther now began to support the idea of secular involvement in religious affairs, and he forwarded letters to the chancellery with advice and calls for a visitation. With one eye on the radicals, Luther and the Saxon reformers

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[21] Paul Wappler, *Die Täuferbewegung in Thüringen von 1526–1554* (Jena, 1913), pp. 5–89.

[22] Hermann Kunst, *Evangelischer Glaube und politische Verantwortung. Martin Luther als Berater seiner Landesherrn und seine Teilnahme an den Fragen des öffentlichen Lebens* (Stuttgart, 1976), pp. 191–206.

[23] Quoted in James M. Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God: Secular Authority and the Church in the Thought of Luther and Melanchthon, 1518–1559* (Leiden, 2005), p. 190.

[24] John S. Oyer, *Lutheran Reformers against Anabaptists. Luther, Melanchthon and Menius and the Anabaptists of Central Germany* (The Hague, 1964), p. 136.

proclaimed that all public religion that was not fully in accordance with the teaching of Wittenberg and its approved preachers was blasphemy and destructive of the civil peace. And given that the Church was in the grip of the Antichrist, it was the duty of the prince to root it out.[25]

The process against Hans Mohr is illustrative of this development. In 1528, Mohr, captain of the castle of Coburg, fell suspect due to his sacramentarian beliefs. Acting on the directives coming from Wittenberg, the local authorities sent the details of the case to Elector Johann, who then forwarded them to Luther for advice on how he should deal with the man, who to that point had been considered an honourable and valuable soldier. Luther feared Mohr might try to win others to his views, and thus ordered in the first instance that 'his mouth should be stopped'. Once it became clear, however, that Mohr would not abandon his beliefs, harsher measures proved necessary, and ultimately the secular officials relieved him of his post and placed him in prison.[26] The entire process was carried out in accordance with the *Instructions*, with both secular and spiritual authorities working together to bring Mohr to account.

Philipp Melanchthon, who drafted the *Instructions*, would later provide the theological legitimization for this relationship, and in the process partly eclipse Luther's earlier caveats about keeping the secular and the spiritual at a distance.[27] According to Melanchthon, the prince had a God-given obligation to intervene and introduce reform, partly due to the fact that as 'chief member of the church' (*praecipuum membrum ecclesiae*) he had inherited this charge, but also because Melanchthon maintained, as did Erasmus and many commentators before him, that the state itself was a Christian entity with a religious purpose. In working out his ideas, Melanchthon built on Luther's theological foundations. He developed a theory of Church–state relations that remained faithful to the two-kingdoms framework while drawing on the idea of the priesthood of all believers and the commands of brotherly love in order to provide the justification. Unlike the early Luther, however, Melanchthon spoke openly about the positive obligation to watch over the Church that inhered in secular rule. In essence, he was the first of the magisterial reformers to offer a defence of the *cura religionis* of the emerging Protestant princes. Without usurping the authority of the ministry or offending the glory of God, and

[25] Paul Wappler, *Inquisition und Ketzerprozesse in Zwickau zur Reformationszeit* (Leipzig, 1908), pp. 1–69; 85–95.

[26] WA Br., vol.4 (1933), pp. 347–50.

[27] Though, as James Estes has recently illustrated, in the fundamentals Luther and Melanchthon were essentially in agreement; see Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God*.

without trespassing on theological terrain, the state and its sovereign had the duty to preserve the earthly Church and oversee the faith.[28]

The main features of Melanchthon's thought on this theme were already present in the second edition of the *Loci Communes* (1535), where he argued openly that the secular authorities, as 'Gods' and 'guardians' of the Church, had the obligation to uphold true religion and watch over the Church. This not only repeated the obligation to preserve the public peace for the sake of earthly order; it also evoked the divine commission, which inhered in earthly rule, to realize the True Church on earth. As James Estes has observed, by the 1530s, in his interpretation of 1 Timothy 2:2, Melanchthon's emphasis had shifted from the beginning to the end of the passage: that is, let us pray and give thanks for all men, 'for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all *godliness* and *holiness*'.[29] At this stage Melanchthon was also stressing the necessity for the secular authorities to watch over both tables of the Decalogue, not just the final seven commands dealing with worldly relations, but the first three as well, those which concerned the externals of the faith and thus the proper public worship of God.

Melanchthon synthesized his mature views on the powers of the secular arm in *De officio principum* (1539), one of the final works in his corpus of thought on the theme, and one that proved extremely influential in Lutheran Germany.[30] And while it had its own intrinsic logic, a fusion of Erasmian ideals and Lutheran insight, like Luther he too developed much of his thought in response to the threats posed by the activities of the Anabaptists. Much of the 1535 *Loci Communes*, for instance, was revised with the radicals in mind, and in particular his defence of the *cura religionis* of the secular magistrates and the divine origins of secular rule. Moreover, as he worked out his ideas, he continued to press the prince and his advisors to act against the Anabaptist communities and bring them to justice. Indeed, to a much greater extent than Luther, Melanchthon never lost the scent of Anabaptist blood, and he called for the death penalty for all instances of blasphemy. As he wrote in the final edition of the *Loci Communes* (1559):

> the authorities [princes] must watch over the second table of commandments, and the first even more so. For the rulers have to serve the honour of God

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[28] Ralph Keen, *Divine and Human Authority in Reformation Thought: German Theologians on Political Order, 1520–1555* (Nieuwkoop, 1997), p. 49; James M. Estes, 'The Role of Godly Magistrates in the Church: Melanchthon as Luther's Interpreter and Collaborator', *Church History*, 67 (1998): 463–83.

[29] Estes, *Peace, Order and the Glory of God*, p. 126. NIV translation.

[30] Ibid., p. 177: 'So clear and persuasive to adherents of the magisterial Reformation were those arguments that it is difficult to find a German Protestant theologian from 1535 onward (until well into the following century) who did not take them over virtually unchanged.'

above all things. They are the guardians of the church. And whoever has taken the name of God in vain, he should be punished by death.[31]

The Protestant Church orders of the sixteenth century formalized this relationship. Most opened with a preface elevating the prince to the status of guardian over the faith. The sovereign had been placed in office 'not only to preserve the common peace, and with it all honour and discipline', but also to defend true religion, and this meant enforcing the requirements of the Decalogue. In the words of one Lutheran order, it was the prince's duty 'to safeguard God's name and his Word' and to ensure that the faithful 'were protected from error in pure, healthy teaching and proper belief'.[32] Throughout the German lands in the sixteenth century, the princes defined the nature of acceptable belief in Church orders, secular mandates and educational programmes. Margrave Georg of Brandenburg-Ansbach, for instance, empowered Johannes Brenz to work alongside Nuremberg's Andreas Osiander in drafting the *Brandenburg-Nuremberg Church Order* (1533). Once it was published, all clergy and all parishioners were obliged to honour this Lutheran statement of the faith. It was introduced into the churches, taught in the schools, and Osiander's catechism (appended to the order) was used to indoctrinate the young. The margrave thus determined the religion of his subjects; all other faiths (Catholicism, Anabaptism, Calvinism) were anathema. In essence, the Protestant prince was acting like a bishop, legislating what people might believe and how they should come to believe it. Such was the nature of Church rule in all of the Protestant territories in Germany, from Württemberg to Pomerania, Albertine Saxony to the Rhine Palatinate. The Reformation had invested the sovereigns with the right to police their subjects' thoughts as they previously policed their actions.[33]

Of course, claims to be God's agent on earth did not separate Protestant from Catholic rulers, nor did the emphasis placed on morals, piety, or indeed the prominent role of the prince within the Church. The essential difference was the extent to which the Protestant prince was both an active participant in the shaping and defending of the faith (as the *princeps*

[31] Wappler, *Inquisition und Ketzerprozesse,* p. 95.

[32] Heinrich Schmidt, 'Kirchenregiment und Landesherrschaft im Selbstverständnis niedersächsischer Fürsten des 16. Jahrhunderts', *Niedersächsisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte*, 56 (1984): 31–58; Hans-Walter Krumwiede, 'Reformation und Kirchenregiment in Württemberg', *Blätter für Württembergische Kirchengeschichte*, 68/69 (1968/69): 81–111; Emil Sehling (ed.), *Die evangelischen Kirchenordungen des XVI. Jahrhunderts* (16 vols, Tübingen, 1902–), vol. 15, *Württemberg I,* (1977), pp. 55–6.

[33] Ibid., vol. 15, pp. 55–6; Dixon, *Reformation and Rural Society*, pp. 47–54, 143–62; on the rise of the Protestant princely state in general, see C. Scott Dixon, 'The Princely Reformation in Germany', in Andrew Pettegree (ed.), *The Reformation World* (London, 2000), pp. 146–68.

eruditus) and, as a consequence, the extent to which he could draw on religion to legitimize and consolidate his rule.[34] By way of analogy, in medieval Catholic thought, kingship was defined against the backdrop of two cognate traditions, that of the mystical corpus of the Church and the corpus of the secular realm. Out of this dualism arose the theory of the two bodies of the king.[35] In the Protestant scheme, with the sacral dimension abolished and religion bound so closely to the secular in the compact of the territorial Church, the two worlds were united in the figuration of the prince. There was a single corpus.

Faith, Sovereignty and Identity

The image of the Protestant prince was first captured in the flood of *Fürstenspiegel* ('princely mirrors') written for the second generation of Reformation sovereigns.[36] The central purpose of the Protestant mirror was to demonstrate the dangers of the secular world (often referred to as the *regnum diaboli*) and the inability of fallen man to establish any sort of order without complete trust in the Word of God. Thus, when the evangelical authors spoke of the learned prince, they meant something more than the *rex philosophus* of the humanist tradition. The Protestant prince had to be versed in Scripture, not only capable of defending the Church in his lands and watching over the salvation of his subjects, but theologically astute enough to recognize that there could be no rule on earth without proper faith and fear of God.[37] In this sense, the Protestant prince was not marked out by the gift of sanctity (as in the medieval mirrors), but rather by his unique potential for sin. As Luther noted, 'a prince is a man as any other, but one surrounded by ten devils whereas an average man has just the one. [For this reason] God must provide him with special guidance and place his angels by his side.'[38]

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[34] Heinz Duchhardt, 'Das protestantische Herrscherbild des 17. Jahrhunderts im Reich,' in Konrad Repgen (ed.), *Das Herrscherbild im 17. Jahrhundert* (Münster, 1991), pp. 33–4.

[35] Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology* (Princeton, NJ, 1997).

[36] Rainer A. Müller, 'Die deutschen Fürstenspiegel des 17. Jahrhunderts. Regierungslehren und politische Pädagogik', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 240 (1985): 571–98.

[37] Michael Philipp, 'Regierungskunst im Zeitalter der konfessionellen Spaltung. Politische Lehren des mansfeldischen Kanzlers Georg Lauterbech', in Hans-Otto Mühleisen (ed.), *Politische Tugendlehre und Regierungskunst. Studien zum Fürstenspiegel der Frühen Neuzeit* (Tübingen, 1990), pp. 85–92.

[38] WA, vol. 36, p. 245; Michael Götz, 'Gottes Wort als Anleitung zum Handeln für den lutherischen Fürsten. Thomas Bircks Fürstenspiegel', in Mühleisen (ed.), *Politische Tugendlehre*, pp. 118–39. The importance of the Word of God for the rule and conduct of a prince is commonly the central message of the Protestant

This shift in emphasis had a number of implications for the perception of the ruler and the expectations of rule. To begin with, the prince, as God's first vassal on earth, was now responsible for the care of the earthly Church; he had to preserve the true faith and the preaching of the Word. Theoretically, as later commentators pointed out, this was a much more dynamic conception of rule than the medieval variant, as the ruler and his court were much more personally engaged with all aspects of the godly commonwealth.[39] In addition, given that the prince was a sinner like all other men and stood in the same relationship to the divine as all other men, it followed that he was subject to the same laws of the Christian commonwealth. In the end, as Luther implied, the only thing that distinguished a prince was the quality of sins he might commit – and yet it was exactly this, in the Protestant scheme of things, that invested the sovereign with such importance for the political and religious order. For if a ruler, surrounded by temptation, could remain true to the faith, what lesser man might not be inspired by this example of 'the living law'? Moreover, given that he was so highly attuned to the temptations, what better man than the prince had the authority and the legitimacy to dictate the terms of the compact? As Leonhard Werner wrote in his *Mirror of Princely Consolation* (1562):

> For precisely because all authority and its orders are in the service of God, so too must all such works that rightly belong to a prince in his office of rule be good works, for he serves God in his stead – just as a preacher preaches the holy gospel and ministers the holy sacraments according to the express intentions of our Lord Jesus Christ.[40]

With the culture of good works discredited and earthly deeds distanced from the idea of the ever-present threat of the Last Judgement and the related notion that secular rulings figured in the final reckoning, the prince was perceived as less of a judge of the Old Testament type and more of a counsel for the teaching of Christ. More emphasis was placed in the princes (or the authorities in general) in their roles as overseers of the divine commission, which was to preserve the secular realm in accordance

Fürstenspiegel. Examples include: Johann Schuwardt, *Regententaffell* (1583); Thomas Sigfrid, *Aulicus Praeceptor* (1594), pp. B^{r}–D^{v}; Friedrich Glaser, *Oculus Principis* (1595), pp. Biii^{v}–Fviii^{r}; Johann Schramm, *Fasciculus Historiarum* (1589), pp. 30^{v}–31^{r}.

[39] Horst Dreitzel, *Monarchiebegriffe in der Fürstengesellschaft: Theorie der Monarchie* (Cologne, 1991), vol. 2, p. 499: 'Der Fürst und sein Hof sollen also als Vorbild wirken – nicht, wie in der katholischen Politica christiana, durch ihre "Majestät".'

[40] Leonhard Werner, *Fürstlicher Trostspiegel* (1562), p. 5.

with the laws of the Scripture, to which they themselves – above all men – were bound.[41]

Despite the tenor of the language in works of this kind, there was no place for the *rex et sacerdos* of medieval theology. The combination of the priesthood of all believers and the Lutheran insistence that each worldly office had equal validity in the eyes of God undermined the idea of the ruler being invested with a higher degree of sacramental authority. Johannes Bugenhagen made this point in his coronation sermon for Christian II, the Lutheran king of Denmark. Although little of the liturgy had been changed for the event, Bugenhagen stressed that the royal consecration had no effect in the sense of a sacrament; the significance of the rite was symbolic, a means of making sensible the pledge made by the sovereign to uphold the trust placed in him by God.[42] And while this did not have a direct impact on the standing of the German princes, as they were never objects of a sacramental rite of coronation (only the emperor had a ritual anointment), the explicit desacralization of the rite – and, by implication, rulership – in the teaching of the reformers undoubtedly contributed to a shift of perception. Paradoxically, however, rather than weakening the standing of the prince, it tended to invest him with even greater authority. No longer reliant on the mediation and legitimation of the Catholic Church, the princes could assume rule with the claim that they had been placed directly in office by God. Heirs of a divine commission, and thus to an extent above the laws of the secular realm, the Protestant rulers began to develop their own notions of sacral sovereignty, speaking in terms of the majesty and the charisma of kingship and stressing their unmediated proximity to the will and the Word of the divine. Indeed, in this sense the standing of the Protestant prince outweighed that of his medieval forbearer, for he did not just represent a sacramental instance of divine favour: the prince had become the mediator of the divine covenant, entrusted with the enforcement of his laws and the preservation of his honour, and all with a view to the sacral welfare of the land.[43]

The idea of a German prince assuming such eminence within an imagined community of the elect was legitimized by the Reformation, but it was made possible by decades of nationalist discourse. When the Luther affair first surfaced, two medieval notions of German identity were

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[41] Compare Kirstin Eldyss Sorensen Zapalac, *'In His Image and Likeness': Political Iconography and Religious Change in Regensburg, 1500–1600* (Ithaca, NY, 1990), pp. 55–91, esp. 83.

[42] Hans Liermann, 'Untersuchungen zum Sakralrecht des protestantischen Herrschers', *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte. KA*, 30 (1941): 329–38; on this theme in general, see Jens Ivo Engels, 'Das "Wesen" der Monarchie? Kritische Anmerkungen zum "Sakralkönigtum" in der Geschichtswissenschaft', *Majestas*, 7 (1999): 3–39.

[43] Seckendorff, *Teutscher Fürsten-Stat*, p. 25.

in flux. One the one hand there was the idea of the *Imperium Romanum*, the sacral empire bequeathed to the German kings, and on the other the notion of the German Nation, a community defined primarily by language, custom, history and political reality. Despite this dual inheritance, there was a fairly consolidated impression of national self-perception on the eve of Reformation. Politically, the Estates had become much more aware of the unique system which marked out the land and its people, and they began to speak of the need to secure the German Nation in the face of external threats.[44] At the same time, a latent sense of identity began to find expression in the works of the theologians and the humanists. From the work of Nicholas of Cusa and Gregor Heimburg to the *Grievances of the German Nation* (*Gravamina nationis Germanicae*), the underlying thread remained the desire to invest the German Church with its own legitimacy and remove Rome from national affairs. Prophecies and prognostications spoke of the fall of the Catholic Church and the rise of a heroic emperor, while tracts and pamphlets appeared projecting a new social order (largely taken from the *Germania* of Tacitus) based on the supposed primal virtues of the German race – honesty, piety, a love of liberty and fatherland – which, according to the humanists, once flourished in the land.[45]

The Reformation movement borrowed from this nationalist spirit, but it also reworked and reconfigured it at two levels: at the level of the *Reich*, and the level of the territory. From the outset, the integrity of the Holy Roman Empire was necessarily weakened by the attack on the Catholic Church. The main author of this revaluation was Martin Luther, who contributed to the making of German identity by unmasking the papacy as the Antichrist

[44] Peter Moraw, 'Bestehende, fehlende und heranwachsende Voraussetzungen des deutschen Nationalbewußtseins im späten Mittelalter', in Joachim Ehlers (ed.), *Ansätze und Diskontinuität deutscher Nationsbildung im Mittelalter* (Sigmaringen, 1989), p. 107; Heinrich Lutz, 'Die deutsche Nation zu Beginn der Neuzeit. Fragen nach dem Gelingen und Scheitern deutscher Einheit im 16. Jahrhundert', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 234 (1982): 529–59; Heinz Thomas, 'Die Deutsche Nation und Martin Luther', *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 105 (1985): 426–54; Ulrich Nonn, 'Heiliges Römisches Reich Deutscher Nation. Zum Nationen-Begriff im 15. Jahrhundert', *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 9 (1982): 129–42; Georg Schmidt, 'Luther und die frühe Reformation – ein nationales Ereignis?', in Bernd Moeller (ed.), *Die frühe Reformation in Deutschland als Umbruch* (Gütersloh, 1998), pp. 54–75. For a recent reinterpretation of the development of the German Nation, see Georg Schmidt, *Geschichte des Alten Reiches. Staat und Nation in der Frühen Neuzeit 1495–1806* (Munich, 1999); for the debate it has aroused, see Heinz Schilling, 'Reichs-Staat und frühneuzeitliche Nation der Deutschen oder teilmodernisiertes Reichssystem', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 272 (2001): 377–95; Georg Schmidt, 'Das frühneuzeitliche Reich – komplementärer Staat und föderative Nation', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 273 (2001): 371–99.

[45] A.G. Dickens. *The German Nation and Martin Luther* (London, 1974), pp. 1–48; Hans Kloft, 'Die Germania des Tacitus und das Problem eines deutschen Nationalbewußtseins', *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, 72 (1990): 93–114.

and severing all association with Rome. Two theological insights provided the foundation. First, in identifying the Antichrist, he ignored the corpus of medieval speculation and located the proofs in Scripture – it was solely a theological claim; and second, he made the Antichrist a collective rather than an individual threat. As he wrote in the *Babylonian Captivity*, the final antagonist was not a person but an institution.[46] This had the effect of locating and pluralizing the enemy. Luther's Antichrist, unlike medieval notions of the Antichrist, was physically present. In his view, the prophecy of Daniel, which associated the Antichrist with the fourth monarchy (Roman Empire) had been fulfilled, leaving Luther to conclude that the present empire was a mere counterfeit of the original, a deception invented by the papacy and entrusted to the Germans. 'For the Emperor is not the Emperor at all,' he wrote, 'but rather the Pope, to whom the Emperor is as submissive as a slave.'[47] In nationalistic discourse, this tended to make the German rulers even more unique, in that God had invested them with the task of defending the faith while both Rome and the empire succumbed to corruption.

The other contribution of the Reformation to the making of German identity was more profane, and more in the manner of an event. With the appearance of Martin Luther, the vague sense of expectation assumed an immediacy. He worked as a catalyst for public perception, convincing people that the time to act had finally arrived. In large part, this was due to his own skills as a publicist. In his reforming tract *Address to the Christian Nobility* (1520), Luther announced that a new age had dawned. 'The time for silence is over,' he wrote, paraphrasing *Ecclesiastes*, 'and the time for speech has come.' In the *Address*, Luther wrote directly to the princes of the German Nation and outlined a programme of reform that was little less than the manifesto for a national movement. Moreover, unlike previous (medieval) proposals, the *Address* spoke in a much more direct and aggressive tone. Luther did not just list the grievances and hope for better days; he targeted the cause of Germany's misery (the Papacy) and called for immediate action.[48] Borrowing from the traditional themes in the grievances and various conciliar tracts, he also seems to have made use

[46] On Luther's ideas of the Antichrist, see Hans Preuss, *Die Vorstellungen vom Antichrist im späteren Mittelalter, bei Luther und in der konfessionellen Polemik* (Leipzig, 1907), pp. 83–144.

[47] Arno Seifert, *Der Rückzug der biblischen Prophetie von der neueren Geschichte. Studien zur Geschichte der Reichstheologie des frühneuzeitlichen deutschen Protestantismus* (Cologne, 1990), p. 9. In making this claim, Luther was thus suggesting that the actual recipient of imperial power was the pope himself. See Jean Schillinger, 'Luther et l'idée d'empire', in Jean-Marie Valentin (ed.), *Luther et la Réforme. Du Commentaire de l'Epître aux Romains à la Messe allemande* (Paris, 2001), pp. 116–17.

[48] Thomas, 'Die Deutsche Nation und Martin Luther', pp. 449–52.

of more activist clerical works such as the *Reformatio Sigismundi* and the report on the reform of the German Church drawn up by Jacob Wimpfeling at the request of Emperor Maximilian. The *Address* was infused with the popular anti-papal language of the day, and it was clearly (and openly) indebted to the work of the humanists. The result was a work, to cite its most exact interpreter, with an 'extremely lively relationship to the present',[49] and thus a text which offered both a point of origin and a fresh horizon for the creation of German identity. After decades of waiting for a new age to commence, Luther simply proclaimed that it had begun.

We can get a sense of this transformation by looking at the shifts in Protestant dynastic self-understanding. In Hesse, the history of the ruling house was reworked in the wake of the Reformation. In medieval accounts, in addition to important founding figures such as Saint Boniface, Charles Martel and the early Ludowinger rulers, the roots of the ancestral tree were traced back to Saint Elisabeth of Thuringia, medieval countess, daughter of the king of Hungary, and grandmother of Heinrich of Brabant, this latter role affording her the status of the mediatrix of legitimacy as rule passed to the Brabant lineage. Hessian genealogy was thus grounded in the twelfth century, and the main point of the association with Elisabeth was to invest the ruling princes with sacral authenticity. After Philipp of Hesse introduced the Lutheran faith, however, the history was rewritten. Elisabeth was cast as the pious wife of a landgrave, an unwitting exemplar of Lutheran sanctification, but nothing more. Philipp had her reliquary opened and her bones profaned, he replaced her image on all coins and medallions with his own, and stipulated that his final resting place would be Kassel rather than Marburg (where his ancestors had been interred beside the saint). In place of a line of descent associated with Elisabeth the saintly Hungarian, the Hessian chroniclers now fashioned a narrative which privileged Sophia, daughter of Elisabeth and mother of Heinrich, and traced a genealogy which began with the dukes of Brabant but reached back to Charlemagne – thus a family with German origins and vestiges of the imperial bloodline, but no sacral ancestry.[50]

[49] Walther E. Köhler, *Luthers Schrift 'An den christlichen Adel deutscher Nation' im Spiegel der Kultur- und Zeitgeschichte* (Halle, 1895), p. 94.

[50] A process recently illustrated in a series of articles by Thomas Fuchs. See Thomas Fuchs, 'Fürstliche Erinnerungspolitik und Geschichtsschreibung im frühneuzeitlichen Hessen', in Werner Rösener (ed.), *Adelige und bürgerliche Erinnerungskulturen des Spätmittelalters und der Frühen Neuzeit* (Göttingen, 2000), pp. 205–26; Thomas Fuchs, 'Transformation der Geschichtsschreibung im Hessen des 16. Jahrhunderts', *Hessisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte*, 48 (1998): 63–82; Thomas Fuchs, 'Ständischer Aufstieg und dynastische Propaganda. Das Haus Hessen und sein Erbrecht auf Brabant', *Hessisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte*, 52 (2002): 19–53; see also Karl E. Demandt, 'Verfremdung und Wiederkehr der Heiligen Elisabeth', *Hessisches Jahrbuch für Landesgeschichte*, 22 (1972): 112–61.

A similar exercise in confessional revisionism occurred in the duchy of Anhalt, where in mid-century the Lutheran Duke Georg III commissioned Ernst Brotuff to compile a new account of the origins of the house. Brotuff's *Genealogia und Chronica*, which included a preface by Melanchthon, who had already published a short work on Georg III praising his piety and learning, redirected the history of the dynasty. Tracing the origins back to the sixth century, the main focus of the work was devoted to the German origins of the line, and in particular the close relations with Brandenburg and Saxony, while the narrative made a gradual ascent from the depths of medieval Catholicism to the arrival of the Reformation, which comes to a close with the apotheosis of the three pious princes of Anhalt, Georg, Johann and Joachim.[51] In Caspar Peucer's later history, the trajectory was similar. All medieval speculation linking the house with Italian forefathers was rejected; the Anhalt dynasty came from German stock (proven by onomastic association: Ascanes, Thuiscones, Teutsche). Moreover, the entire narrative was written with one outcome in mind – the Reformation – and the contribution of the various princes to this event. In this history, the dynasty reaches its culmination with the three Lutheran princes of mid-century and their defence of the Word of God. This was projected as Anhalt's greatest contribution to the fatherland (by which Peucer meant the duchy itself).[52]

Perhaps the most potent reflection of this change can be viewed with reference to Luther's own land of Electoral Saxony. In the medieval period, the dynastic imagination of the Wettin princes was closely tied to two sacral communities: the Roman Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire. The former was made most manifest in the famous relics collection in the castle church, while the latter, the imperial realm, was expressed through the artwork in the churches and the residence as well as the literary and historical works, paramount being the *Chronicle of the Saxons* (1492), which was essentially a register of Saxon relations with the various

[51] Martin Hecht, 'Hofordnung, Wappen und Geschichtsschreibung. Fürstliches Rangbewusstsein und dynastische Repräsentation in Anhalt in 15. und 16. Jahrhundert,' in Werner Freitag and Michael Hecht (ed.), *Die Fürsten von Anhalt. Herrschaftssymbolik, dynastische Vernunft und politische Konzepte in Spätmittelalter und Früher Neuzeit* (Halle 2003), pp. 103–9; Ernst Brotuff, *Genealogia und Chronica, des Durchlauchten Hochgebornen, Königlichen und Fürstlichen Hauses, der Fürsten zu Anhalt* (Leipzig 1556), Ci^{r}–Cvi^{v}; Philipp Melanchthon, *Von des hochlöblichen, Christlichen Fürsten und Herrn, Georgen Fürsten zu Anhalt* (Wittenberg, 1554), pp. Bv^{v}–Bvi^{r}; later histories largely followed the narrative established by Brotuff, among them the work by Bartholomäus Clamorin, *Descriptio Historica, praeclarae, magnificae et antiquae stirpis, principum Anhaldinorum* (Dresden, 1587).

[52] Caspar Peucer, *Kurtze Historische Erzelung, Von dem Fürstlichem Hause zu Anhalt.* (Wittenberg 1572), Bi^{r}–Ci^{r}.

emperors and their subsequent rewards.[53] A century and a half later, as Johann Meisner described the land in an anniversary sermon, a different sense of community had evolved. Wittenberg was now eulogized as the very centre of the world, 'because it was in this place,' claimed Meisner, 'as out of Zion, as it were, that the light of [God's] gospel was set aflame'.[54] The relic collection that had once made Wittenberg such an important site of pilgrimage no longer existed. Save a chalice that had been gifted to Luther, the collection had been dismantled and sent to Nuremberg, where it was melted down to pay off the debts of Elector Johann.[55] Many of the medieval paintings and the portraits had been removed or destroyed; in their place was a series of portraits of the electors, now with German verse celebrating their contributions to the land of Saxony. Visitors travelled to the city in order to take in the display of artefacts associated with the Reformation, including Cranach's portraits of Luther and Melanchthon, together with their tombs in the church, and the statues and memorials devoted to Friedrich and Johann Friedrich, the two great champions of the Lutheran faith.

When Balthasar Menz visited Wittenberg at the end of the sixteenth century, he noted how rebuilding had covered up the traces of the past. Even the gold lettering Elector Friedrich had embossed over the gate of the residence referring to his role as marshal of the empire now sat beneath layers of chalk left during recent renovations.[56] The old notions of sacral

[53] On the origins of the relic collection, see Enno Bünz, 'Zur Geschichte des Wittenberger Heiltums. Johannes Nühn als Reliquienjäger in Helmarshausen und Hersfeld', *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Thüringische Geschichte*, 52 (1998): 135–58; on late medieval Saxon identity, see Günter Werner, *Ahnen und Autoren. Landeschroniken und kollektive Identitäten um 1500 in Sachsen, Oldenburg und Mecklenburg* (Husum, 2002), pp. 57–129.

[54] Johann Meisner, *Jubilaeum Wittebergense* (Wittenberg, 1668), p. 6; the full range of Old Testament types had been explored a few years earlier in Caspar Schmidt, *Wittenbergisches Jerusalem* (Wittenberg, 1640).

[55] Ernst Müller, 'Die Entlassung des ernestinischen Kämmerers Johann Rietesel im Jahre 1532 und die Auflösung des Wittenberger Heiligtums. Ein Beitrag zur Biographie des Kurfürsten Johann des Beständigen von Sachsen', *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, 80 (1989): 228–31. The evangelical objection to the relic collection was neatly summarized by a sixteenth-century reader in the margin of a copy of the *Dye Zaigung des hochlobwirdigen hailigthums der Stifft Kirchen aller hailigen zu Wittenburg* (Wittenberg, 1509), presently in the Herzog August Bibliothek, Wolfenbüttel (154.2 Theol.), p. Aiii: 'die ewige selikeit kan niemant erwerben noch erehrben, Sie ist eine gabe Gottes'. The *Zaigung* (along with the inventory of the Halle collection) was reissued as part of the Reformation centenary celebrations, though this time with a preface pointing out how they are testimony to the deceit and corruption of the Roman Catholic Church. See Wolfgang Franz, *Historischer Erzehlung Der Beyden Heiligthümen* (Wittenberg, 1618).

[56] Balthasar Menz, *Stambuch und kurtze Erzehlung* (Wittenberg, 1598), pp. Mii^{v}–Miii^{r}. Until it perished in the fire of 1760, the door of the Castle Church itself became something of a relic. Matthaeus Faber included an engraving in

community had given way to a more localized and secularized sense of identity.

The Rise of Confessional Politics

Scripture enabled the evangelical princes to imagine the religious conflict in terms of root dichotomies – law versus Gospel, good versus evil, Christ versus the Antichrist – and thereby serve as the template for an early sense of confessional identity. This first became apparent at the diet of Speyer (1526), when Protestant princes such as Philipp of Hesse and Johann Friedrich of Saxony arrived at the gathering with the letters VDMIE (*verbum domini manet in aeternum*) stitched onto the sleeves of their livery. Within a few years this slogan had spread throughout the Protestant camp in a variety of media (clothes, banners, coins, swords, powder flasks, horse muzzles, cannon bores and halberds), and it was clearly meant to distinguish the community of the godly from the rest of the Catholic lands.[57] In the art and imagery of the courts as well, the symbolism changed by mid-century: from portraits to public theatre to music, the Protestant princes began to define themselves *against* the Catholic Empire by drawing on the evangelical faith.[58] Protestant imagery became brazenly anti-Catholic, often evoking figures or types from Scripture to portray local history, as did the Old Testament studies commissioned by Moritz of Saxony for the walls of the loggia, or the more personal visual histories of the Ernestine princes devised with a view to their heroic struggle against the forces of the Antichrist in the early years of the Reformation. Indeed, the new sense of Protestant identity that evolved in Saxony was deliberately and meticulously fashioned, and it was nothing less than an attempt to re-imagine the recent past within the framework of sacral history. Thus in a range of paintings and engravings, Johann Friedrich, defeated and imprisoned by Emperor Charles V after the Battle of Mühlberg, became the wounded Protestant warrior, with the scar on his cheek as stigma and biblical verse on the edge of the portrait testifying to his role as the new Daniel. More direct was the series of woodcuts depicting the baptism of

his bicentenary history that depicted tourists stopping before the door. He also provided a rather brief and embarrassed history of the relic collection for the 'curious reader'. See Matthaeus Faber, *Kurtzgefaste Historische Nachricht von der Schloß- und Academischen Stiffts-Kirche zu Aller-heiligen in Wittenberg* (Wittenberg, 1717), pp. 192–94.

[57] F.J. Stopp, '*Verbum Domini Manet in Aeternum*. The Dissemination of a Reformation Slogan, 1522–1904,' in Siegbert S. Prawer, R. Hinton Thomas and Leonard Forster (ed.), *Essays in German Language, Culture and Society* (London, 1969), pp. 123–35; Meisner, *Jubilaeum Wittebergense*, p. 107.

[58] For the rise of Protestant court culture, see Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly, *Court Culture in Dresden: From Renaissance to Baroque* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 5–36.

Christ in the Elbe, with the Ernestine princes and their families, joined by Martin Luther, bearing witness to the event.[59]

Mühlberg and its aftermath, however, remind us that these shifts in perception had profound consequences for political relations. The fault lines became apparent in the immediate wake of the defeat, as the Protestants, forced to kneel before Emperor Charles V and effect the traditional act of supplication, began to express public pangs of conscience. Some of the princes were unable to divorce the ritual from its sacramental (and thus idolatrous) overtones and expressed their reservations about this type of 'Egyptian adoration'.[60] The political ideology behind this aversion had been worked out years before in the theories of resistance formulated to justify the creation of the League of Schmalkald, a military alliance with the explicit purpose of resisting the emperor. Realizing that the faith could not survive long isolated and defenceless, the Lutherans had been compelled to join forces and develop a theory of resistance that pitched the German princes against the Habsburg emperor. The theoretical foundations differed: while the Hessians drew on a notion of constitutional resistance grounded in the belief that the emperor did not rule as a monarch, but rather shared sovereignty with the imperial estates, the Saxon jurists built on theories of private law, claiming that when an authority went beyond the bounds of his office, he was no longer a rightful judge but a private citizen, and hence no longer a lawful magistrate. In this case, the emperor was abusing his office by legislating in matters of belief.[61] Notwithstanding the different approaches, the end result was a general ideology of resistance shared by

[59] Even within a biblical landscape on this scale, there was a place for local history. For those with a keen eye, the townscape of Wittenberg could be seen in the background, its towers, having fallen victim to imperial forces, deprived of their gothic points. See Carl C. Christensen, *Princes and Propaganda: Electoral Saxon Art of the Reformation* (Kirksville, MO, 1992), pp. 92–101; Ingrid Schulze, *Lucas Cranach d. J. und die protestantische Bildkunst in Sachsen und Thüringen* (Jena, 2004), pp. 87–102; on more general themes relating to the rise of territorial identity in Saxony, see the contributions in Michael Beyer, Andreas Gößner and Günther Wartenberg (eds), *Kirche und Regionalbewußtsein in Sachsen im 16. Jahrhundert. Regionenbezogene Identifikationsprozesse im konfessionellen Raum* (Leipzig, 2003); for the development of a Protestant princely iconography, see Naima Ghermani, 'Une difficile représentation? Les portraits de princes calvinistes dans l'Empire allemand à la fin du XVIe siècle', *Revue Historique*, 635 (2005): 561–91.

[60] Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger, 'Knien vor Gott – knien vor dem Kaiser. Zum Ritualwandel im Konfessionskonflikt', in Gerd Althoff (ed.), *Zeichen – Rituale – Werte. Internationales Kolloquium des Sonderforschungsbereichs 496 an der Westfälischen Wilhelms-Universität Münster* (Münster, 2004), pp. 501–32.

[61] Eike Wolgast, *Die Religionsfrage als Problem des Widerstandsrechts im 16. Jahrhundert* (Heidelberg, 1980), pp. 9–27; Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought: The Age of Reformation* (Cambridge, 1996), vol. 2, pp. 189–225.

most of the Protestant powers and a general readiness to view the emperor as an enemy of the German people. Moreover, this was clearly affiliated with the emerging sense of fatherland (*patria*) and its association with justice, political order and the preservation of the faith within a given jurisdictional area.[62] The empire was beginning to turn in on itself.

By mid-century, the idea of the papal Antichrist and its association with the emperor had become a central topos in the language of German liberty.[63] And it sounded a clear political note. Even the Catholic princes could agree that Charles's efforts to force through a religious settlement smacked of Roman tyranny. And even in the most candid of the Lutheran theories of resistance, such as the work *About Defence and Self-Defence* (1547) by Regius Selinus, tutor to the children of the Saxon Elector, the main issue was not only one of religious conscience, but rather the liberties of 'our dear Fatherland of the German Nation' and how they had been threatened by Spanish domination and papal tyranny.[64] Little wonder rumours began to surface at the diet of Augsburg (1530) that the Protestant princes were planning to oppose Ferdinand's succession to the imperial crown and replace the Habsburg with a king of their own. Some spoke of Johann Friedrich as the natural choice, but most hope was placed in the candidature of Philipp of Hesse, who emerged as a serious threat after the restitution of Württemberg (1534). As Zwingli prophesied in open letters after the meeting in Marburg, Philipp of Hesse 'has been chosen [by God] to do great things', though the time was not yet ripe to speak openly about what this might mean.[65]

Of course, despite the tensions and crises, and the German wars of mid-century, the empire survived the Reformation, even though over time many of its foundation principles and its higher organs of rule no longer commanded Protestant assent. As Georg Schmidt has remarked: 'while the flawed effectiveness of the empire was repeatedly criticized, its legitimacy as a state was never called into question'.[66] In part this was due to the change of guard: with Charles V retiring to the monastery in Yuste and the deaths of Johann Friedrich and Philipp of Hesse, a generation that thought in extremes passed away. Their successors – Ferdinand and Maximilian, August of Saxony, William IV of Hesse – were more interested in

[62] Von Friedeburg, 'The Making of Patriots', pp. 895–6.

[63] Schmidt, *Geschichte des Alten Reiches*, pp. 75–99.

[64] Robert von Friedeburg, *Self-Defence and Religious Strife in Early Modern Europe. England and Germany, 1530–1680* (Aldershot, 2002), p. 82.

[65] Heinz Duchhardt, *Protestantisches Kaisertum und altes Reich. Die Diskussion über die Konfession des Kaisers in Politik, Publizistik und Staatsrecht* (Wiesbaden, 1997), p. 20.

[66] Georg Schmidt, 'Konfessionalisierung, Reich und Deutsche Nation', in Schindling and Ziegler (eds), *Die Territorien des Reichs*, vol. 7, p. 193.

conservation and consolidation than winning new ground.[67] In part it was due to the nature of the empire and how it actually functioned. Confessional division put an end the idea of a consolidated monarchy, especially once it came into conflict with an idea of German Liberty charged by religious sentiment and embraced by the territorial prince. But as a system of political relations (what Schmidt has likened to a composite monarchy) that dealt with 'federal' concerns such as forms of taxation, the defence of the realm against the Turks, and the general peace and commonwealth, it was not seriously endangered by the process of Reformation.[68]

What did not survive unshaken, however, was the political *integrity* of the empire, and not just the higher ideals, such as its sacral legitimacy and subsequent claims to universal dominion, but its inner constitution. The full range of impact of the Reformation would require an analysis that takes into account the crises and settlements of the seventeenth century, but as two brief examples of the beginnings of this process, we might look at the shift in patterns of patronage effected by religious change and the restructuring of international and inter-territorial relations.

In medieval Germany, both the Catholic Church and the empire provided 'channels of mobility' for the aristocracy of the realm.[69] Indeed, the status of a German prince was more or less defined by his degree of proximity to the Roman king. After the Reformation, due to the centrifugal effects of the confessional dynamic, Protestant princes preferred men of the same religious convictions, a logical preference in an age when the confession of a territory could be perceived as little less than a declaration of war. Viewed in this light, it is little wonder that the prince of Hesse was so interested in men 'who understood matters, and will stick with us against the papists and others ... and will resolutely defend our Christian religion against the Jesuits and their like ...'.[70] In the duchy of Württemberg, the

[67] Manfred Rudersdorf, 'Die Generation der lutherischen Landesväter im Reich. Bausteine zu einer Typologie des deutschen Reformationsfürsten', in Schindling and Ziegler (eds), *Die Territorien des Reichs*, vol. 7, pp. 137–70.

[68] Rudersdorf, 'Die Generation', p. 32: 'Man sah die trennenden konfessionellen Faktoren, fühlte sich aber auf dem festen Boden des Religionsfriedens und hatte überhaupt keinen Grund, eine radikale neue Herrschaftsordnung zu konzipieren – das Reich war Rahmen und Ideologie genug, in ihm konnte sich jeder, der protestantische wie der katholische Fürst, als Pater Patriae fühlen – was gewisse Unterschiede im Selbstverständnis nicht ausschloß.' In later years, as Protestants began to discuss the legitmacy of assuming the imperial throne, emphasis was placed on the 'catholicity' of the evangelical faith. See Duchhardt, *Protestantisches Kaisertum*, pp. 4ff., 329, 126ff.

[69] Wolfgang Reinhard, 'Kirche als Mobilitätskanal der frühneuzeitlichen Gesellschaft', in Winfried Schulze, ed., *Ständische Gesellschaft und soziale Mobilität* (Munich, 1988), pp. 331–51.

[70] Thomas Klein, Der Kampf um die zweite Reformation in Kursachsen, 1586–1591 (Cologne, 1962), p. 98; Volker Press, Calvinismus und Territorialstaat. Regierung und

state ordinance stipulated that state ministers show evidence of 'zeal in the [evangelical] religion' – which essentially meant that Catholics needed to look elsewhere for patronage.[71]

In the search for power and favour, many thus turned to the Habsburg lands, where the Catholic faith was so closely tied to the ideology of rule.[72] Throughout the confessional age, a number of suspect conversions (what contemporaries termed 'court conversions') saw members of the elite rise in imperial favour, including Wolf Siegmund von Losenstein, who was elevated to the rank of Count of the Empire after his conversion, Karl von Liechtenstein, who, once an 'ardent Protestant', became a member of the Privy Council as a Catholic, and Franz Christoph Khevenhüller, whose change of heart saw him rise in imperial service.[73] Protestants could serve the empire as well, and in fact many second-generation Lutheran princes had little difficulty serving both the Catholic Empire and their Protestant subjects. Post-Augsburg Protestant rulers moved freely between imperial and territorial politics, and they made skilled use of the networks and the institutions of the *Reich* to achieve their territorial aims.[74] But this political necessity notwithstanding, it was clearly an advantage in the eyes of the emperor to be a son of the Catholic Church, and there is little doubt that the traditional imperial matrix of power and patronage was transformed by the religious developments of the sixteenth century.

Of course, even more detrimental to the integrity of the empire was the confessionalization of German politics, the gradual disintegration of the unity (or the ideal of unity) of the realm, and the rise of blocs and divisions generated by the new religious order. Historians have traced this process in detail, from the first phase of mid-century theological consolidation as religious ideas began to impact social and political development to the outbreak of the Thirty Years' War, which was, in effect, the final stage of the confessional dynamic and the harvest of decades of political and theological division.[75] The impact was clear to see: the fragmentation of imperial and international relations, the further decentralization and particularization of the *Reich*, the rise of territorial identity and the eclipse of the idea of the

Zentralbehörden der Kurpfalz 1559–1619 (Stuttgart, 1970), pp. 181–266; Georg Schmidt, 'Die zweite Reformation in den Reichsgrafschaften. Konfessionswechsel aus Glaubensüberzeugung oder aus politischem Kalkül?', in Meinrad Schaab (ed.), Territorialstaat und Calvinismus (Stuttgart, 1993), pp. 97–136.

[71] Walter Bernhardt, *Die Zentralbehörden des Herzogtums Württemberg und ihre Beamten 1520–1629* (Stuttgart, 1972), vol. 1, p. 80.

[72] R.J.W. Evans, *The Making of the Habsburg Monarchy 1550–1700: An Interpretation* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 157–308.

[73] Thomas Winkelbauer, *Fürst und Fürstendiener. Gundaker von Liechtenstein, ein österreichischer Aristokrat des konfessionellen Zeitalters* (Vienna, 1999), pp. 66–158, 103.

[74] Rudersdorf, 'Patriarchalisches Fürstenregiment', pp. 309–15.

[75] Schilling, 'Confessionalization in the Empire'.

sacrum imperium, the disintegration of the traditional legal and political bonds (dynastic conventions, unions and alliances, laws and precedents), and the rise of political associations and leagues based upon the principles of a common Protestant faith.[76] The old concerns of imperial statecraft did not just disappear, and even the most pious sovereigns continued to weigh the concerns of the faith against the realities of rule (whether defined against a backcloth of German liberties or the practical necessities of governance); but by the latter decades of the sixteenth century, religion had emerged as one of the central foundations (and in many instances, *the* central foundation) of the strategies and policies that determined political relations between territories and nations. As Holger Thomas Gräf has remarked, with the onset of confessional divisions, 'religious affiliation now formed the basis for political cooperation, which was no longer guaranteed through dynastic affinity or traditional feudal relations and friendships'.[77] Although it did not have a fatal effect on the workings of the *Reich*, confessional plurality did work to undermine the integrity of the late medieval empire.

Conclusion

In the end, it should not come as a surprise that the Reformation gave rise to such a complex landscape of political change in the German lands of the empire. With the introduction of the Peace of Augsburg and the underlying legal principle of the right of reformation, the empire adopted a political and juridical framework that was predisposed to give rise to tension, conflict and plurality.[78] Moreover, due to the nature of the political setting, there was no inevitable pattern to the rise of the confessional state in sixteenth-century Germany, no unobstructed triumph of the confessional will as secular and spiritual authorities joined in common purpose. On the contrary, the introduction of religion into political affairs 'brought both centripetal and centrifugal forces to bear on early modern state building'.[79] For every proof that could be offered in support of the notion that religion

[76] Compare Heinrich Lutz, *Christianitas afflicta. Europa, das Reich und die päpstliche Politik im Niedergang der Hegemonie Kaiser Karls V (1552–1556)* (Göttingen, 1964), pp. 31ff.

[77] Gräf, *Konfession und internationales System*, p. 333.

[78] Axel Gotthard, *Das Alte Reich 1495-1806* (Darmstadt, 2003), pp. 48–85, esp. 61; Schmidt, *Geschichte des Alten Reiches*, pp. 113–49; Heckel, *Deutschland im konfessionellen Zeitalter*, pp. 75–85; Moriz Ritter, *Deutsche Geschichte im Zeitalter der Gegenreformation und des Dreißigjährigen Krieges (1555–1648)* (Stuttgart, 1895), vol. 2, pp. 213–32.

[79] Joel F. Harrington and Helmut Walser Smith, 'Confessionalization, community, and state building in Germany, 1555–1870', *The Journal of Modern History*, 69 (1997): 84.

was a central pillar of absolutism, another could be flourished in defence of the idea that it was one of its most profound constraints.

Yet in substantial respects, the Reformation movement did effect an evident transformation of political culture in the Protestant territories. Church and state formed a closer union, a process with consequences for both the systems and the ideologies of sovereignty; the evangelical prince inherited increased powers of rule and a more profound language of legitimacy; Protestant territories fashioned a new sense of community, new ideas of origins and identity, while relations between the German princes and the empire began to suffer strains and ruptures that had not existed in any previous age. None of this was enough to bring imperial politics to the ultimate breaking point. For Protestant and Catholic alike, the empire remained the only legitimate state. But within the territories, changes had taken place that would have serious implications for later stages of German history. For as Seckendorff remarked in the work cited at the outset:

> even though the German principalities are not monarchies in the strict sense, they contain within them the same broad tracts of land, the same babel of tongues and nations, the same countless customs and mores of diverse peoples, the same unruly subjects and powerful, ill-intentioned neighbours, and in general the same profound and weighty conditions as any of the great kingdoms of the world.[80]

Any change of religion in such a setting would necessarily have implications that reached deep into political life.

[80] Seckendorff, *Teutscher Fürsten-Stat*, p. 85.